

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE FOR TODAY:

This is a document we've prepared to help guide you through a personal study on the overall gifts of the Spirit with a specific emphasis on understanding the believer's personal prayer language.

Unity is very important as we walk together on this journey of exploring what God says about these matters. We can have distinction without having division if we are all willing to give each other room to learn and grow. We must never be willing to negotiate or compromise primary doctrinal issues like the Blood of Jesus as the only way of salvation. Secondary doctrinal issues should be treated in a very different category as we are all working out our salvation before God together as a family.

John Wesley and George Whitefield were friends. Whitefield preached staunchly Calvinist theology while Wesley took exception to his theological conclusions specifically on the issue of free will known as Wesleyan-Arminianism. Wesley actually told Whitefield, "Your God sounds a lot like my devil." This was clearly a point of distinction between the two of them yet their friendship remained strong. In fact their friendship remained so strong that it was John Wesley who conducted George Whitefield's funeral.

Unfortunately Christians have not been well trained in how to pursue and promote maturity and unity when they disagree over doctrine. Again I reiterate, we can have distinction without having division if we are all willing to give each other room to learn and grow.

The birth of the New Testament church brought about the release of God's Spirit in a capacity of human expression that did not previously exist. Various manifestations began taking place.

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (NIV)

We find these same believers gathered together two chapters later being filled with the Spirit again. Obviously being filled with the Spirit is not something that just happens once and we are done being filled.

Acts 4:31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (NIV)

It became an obviously common practice to lay hands on people who believed to receive the Holy Spirit or to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

Acts 9:17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (NIV)

These people were filled with the Holy Spirit while Peter was speaking.

Acts 10:44-46 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. (NIV)

When a person accepts Christ they receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, the Bible makes it clear that there is another experience with the Holy Spirit that happens in addition to this

experience. It is possible to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Holy Spirit at the same time when you become a Christian but Paul asks in Acts 19 making a clear distinction.

Acts 19:1-2 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"... (NIV)

You may be a disciple having been baptized into repentance for your sins as these disciples were. The question rings loudly – did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Follow this text a few verses further and Paul lays hands on them as they begin speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Acts 19:6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (NIV)

This all seemed very intimidating to me as I read these things. I encourage you to pray and seek God for all he has in store for you. It is important to understand that God is willing to move at our pace. These are not things that are required but we are told in Scripture that we should not be uninformed

and that we should stir up an eager desire to pursue spiritual gifts:

1 Cor 12:1 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. NIV

1 Cor 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

As we begin looking at the expression of the gifts it is very important to realize we never lose control of our expression when operating in the gifts. Paul addresses this very specifically in referencing how to do things orderly within congregational gatherings. He explains that the person bringing a prophetic word doesn't do so in a way that is out of that person's control.

1 Cor 14:32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. NIV

You might notice in Acts 2 they were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues.

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (NIV)

They spoke as the Spirit enabled them to do so. The Holy Spirit doesn't speak in tongues for us. None of the gifts of the Spirit happen because God takes over. If you don't speak the prophetic word God reveals you'll not prophesy. If you don't release the word of knowledge God awakens the word will not be spoken. God does not take over your faculties to express his gifts. Many people are confused about this matter as if they are waiting for God to do more than he says he does in Scripture.

It is important to make a distinction between speaking in tongues with interpretation so the church is edified and speaking in tongues personally to God and not to men for personal edification as a personal prayer language. Notice in the same explanation of how we should eagerly desire spiritual gifts Paul gives guidance to this issue of a personal prayer language.

1 Cor 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.

This is not referencing a language that anybody understands, including the person speaking. No one understands him because they are not supposed to.

They are uttering mysteries to God as a personal prayer language not for others so no interpreter is needed. This is a spiritual bubbling and because it isn't understood it is as a mindless babbling. God can give definition to the language but Paul's explanation here doesn't indicate that it would be the norm. This is a prayer language that is specifically to edify the believer speaking and Paul says he would like every believer to speak in tongues. However, he goes on to say how important it is that in the congregational gathering it promotes confusion for people to bring public expressions of their personal prayer language so it is much better to prophesy with understanding.

1 Cor 14:3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. 5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified. NIV

We find that in verse 6 Paul shifts gears into a focus of edifying the congregation and how to bring order to this gift with interpretation as well as all of the gifts functioning congregationally. Then in verse 14 we see again where Paul is speaking of a prayer

language nobody understands encouraging believers to pray in the spirit and to pray with understanding.

1 Cor 14:14-15 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind... NIV

So is it God's plan for every believer to have a prayer language and speak in tongues?

You will notice in 1 Cor 14:4 it references how speaking in your prayer language actually edifies you personally. This is again reiterated in Jude:

Jude 1:20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

This is the only gift of the Spirit that is for self edification and the building up of the believer's faith. Would God want some to be built up in the faith and not others? Acts 10 clearly tells us God doesn't show favoritism so if there is only one gift revealed that builds up the believer using it then surely it is God's plan for every believer to have access to this gift by being filled with the spirit.

Acts 10:34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism (NIV)

Eph 5:18 reveals God's command and will for everybody to be filled with the Spirit. If you are born again then you should eagerly desire spiritual gifts and seek to understand what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

Common things people have said to me when struggling, "Well I've tried it before and it didn't work":

1 Cor 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. 2 For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. (No one understands him – not even him)

THIS IS NOT A LANGUAGE OF THE MIND – IT IS A LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT. So many people get so hung up trying to comprehend what they are supposed to say before they are willing to begin speaking. The natural man will never pray in the spirit.

1 Cor 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

God is not going to manifest through you like some possession taking your will completely out of the picture. Every gift to the body requires a participant who takes that gift and uses it. The gift doesn't use you. You use the gift. If you stand there saying, "When's it going to happen" you will never use the gift.

You got saved by praying an understandable prayer and accepting grace by faith. Did you doubt your salvation ever? Why? Because it's so easy! It's the same with being baptized in the Holy Spirit and using your prayer language. You must move past your doubts and the intellectual gridlock that can so easily keep us in a state of doubtful analysis.

Matt 7:7-11 "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. 8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. 9 "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more

shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (NAS)

Rom 8:26 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for {us} with groanings too deep for words; (NAS)

Common things people have said to me when struggling, “Well I just don’t think its for me”:

1 Corinthians teaches us that we should not forbid speaking in tongues. Don’t dismiss what God tells us not to dismiss. Pray, read and believe God to give you wisdom and revelation to understand more of what he has in store.

1 Cor 2:12-14 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (NAS)

Some people speak totally against the gifts calling them nonsense. Notice a key verse that precedes Jude 1:20 telling us to pray in the spirit building ourselves up in our faith:

Jude 1:10 Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals-- these are the very things that destroy them. (NIV)

Common things people have said to me when struggling, “The gifts of the spirit were for then but not for now”:

First and foremost we must understand that Joel’s prophesy in chapter 2 declares in the last days our sons and daughters will prophesy. If the gifts are gone with the beginning of the church how can this be possible in the last days of the church?

The doctrinal conclusion people use to say the gifts are no longer in operation is a matter of their interpretation in regard to what Paul is referencing when he says that which is imperfect will disappear in 1 Corinthians 13:

1 Cor 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding

gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

Verse 9 10. The [for] introduces the explanation of why the gifts will pass away. A time of perfected knowledge and prophecy is coming. 10. That which is perfect cannot be a reference to the completion of the canon of Scripture; otherwise we now, living in the age of the completed canon, would see more clearly than Paul did (v. 9). Even the most self satisfied and opinionated of theologians would hardly admit that. The coming of that which is perfect can only be a reference to the Lord's second coming. That event will mark the end of the exercise of

prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. How then can one speak of these gifts as temporary? The following verse will answer the question. (from Wycliffe Commentary)

Some claim that this perfection has already come and it is the completion of the Word of God. Therefore their argument is that the gifts have passed away already.

1 Cor 13:11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (NIV)

1 Cor 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy....

Two recommended books:

- Surprised by the Power of the Spirit by Jack Deere
- Why You Should Speak In Tongues by Norvel Hayes